

PUNCHDRUNK: A CASE STUDY

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Master of Science in Arts Administration Drexel University

By

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ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the growth and development of Punchdrunk, a United Kingdom (U.K.) based Theater Company. Punchdrunk's dedication to its aesthetic and brand, combined with dual leadership, creative marketing and inventive partnerships have positioned the organization to reach large audiences and remain nimble in an unstable sector. This paper finds that this organization has risen to the challenge of maintaining artistic integrity and remaining sustainable, challenges which are faced by all nonprofit arts organizations. The combination of traditional funding mechanisms, alternative revenues, creative partnerships and corporate sponsorship enable Punchdrunk to continue to pursue their ambitious mission: to transform the passive consumption of the arts into life changing experiences for everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Punchdrunk's leadership, cast and volunteers. Executive Director, Colin Marsh was very kind to offer access to the U.S. premiere of *Sleep No More* in Boston, Massachusetts. In late February 2010, the organization also welcomed participation in their New York production both as a volunteer and as an audience member. In addition, I would like to personally thank the Arts Administration team at Drexel University, my friends and family and especially, my partner, Jeremy Burrell for his assistance proofreading and editing.

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WHY PUNCHDRUNK?

In winter of 2007, I was given an assignment by Adjunct Professor Roy Wilbur, at Drexel University to listen to a podcast for a Technology and Marketing in the Arts class. Podcast commentators Brad Stephenson and Jason Hansen were reviewing a production of Goethe's *Faust* (Stephenson and Hansen podcast, 2010). This version of *Faust* was presented by Punchdrunk, a non-traditional U.K.-based performing arts organization. Stephenson and Hansen's description of Punchdrunk's production methods and the audience experience immediately captivated my attention.

As a performing arts newcomer, I sensed that this *Faust* and the creative style of Punchdrunk were different from the common definition of "theater". In a typical performing arts production, a ticket holder enters a theater space, sits in an assigned seat and passively views a production.

I had never experienced site-specific performances or participatory events such as flash-mobs¹ where the action is tightly choreographed and the audience is deliberately included in the performance. Punchdrunk's blend of interdisciplinary performing and visual art may offer a glimpse into the future of the field. This idea triggered my interest in the subject of Punchdrunk, as a case study, relating to

¹A group of people summoned (as by e-mail or text message) to a designated location at a specified time to perform an indicated action before dispersing: Merriam-Webster online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flashmob> (Accessed April 21, 2012).

arts administration theories and practices. This case study was researched and written over a three-year period from winter 2010 to winter 2013.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Performing arts organizations face similar challenges in sustainability, funding their work, and balancing artistic purity. Punchdrunk overcomes these challenges by capitalizing on opportunities outside of traditional practices while maintaining artistic integrity; therefore, it is important to compare Punchdrunk's organizational methods to existing research in the field.

Primary research, centered on Punchdrunk, includes a scholarly article by Andrew Englinton, a recorded presentation given by a key Punchdrunk leader and published Trustees' Reports from the U.K. Charity Commission.

Reflections on a Decade of Punchdrunk Theatre by Andrew Englinton was published in TheatreForum, an international theatre journal; Englinton is a Ph.D candidate in documentary theatre at Royal Holloway University of London. The article objectively identifies key themes, concepts and methodologies of Punchdrunk through interviews with organizational leadership, backed by secondary sources. The article categorizes their performances as immersive theater and explores the active role the audience plays in their work. It places Punchdrunk in context with other British performing arts organizations, utilizing similar themes. A key aspect separating Punchdrunk from these contemporaries is the "persistent blurring of boundaries between theatre and non-theatre, and its emphasis on first-person experiences" (Englinton 2010). Englinton introduces characteristics of Punchdrunk's aesthetic value, such as integrating performance with audience, text, space and media. The article identifies the key creative

decision makers within the organization, how the creative process works, and the extent of research and planning that is needed to develop their productions. The article concludes by noting collaborative projects and creative partnerships.

Good Ideas in Entertainment, London is a video recording of Punchdrunk Senior Producer, Colin Nightingale. It was produced and is owned by PSFK.com, a collaborative trend spotting resource for professionals, and is available online. Nightingale describes aspects of Punchdrunk's organizational structure, which presents an overview of their vision and creative processes. It is an objective perspective of the organization from a member of Punchdrunk's key leadership. Nightingale describes how the organization was created, introduces the shared leadership approach, and gives insight into the evolution of Punchdrunk and their funding.

Additional primary research includes four published Trustees' Reports from the U.K. Charity Commission, the official register of charities in the United Kingdom. The reports, covering the year ending March 2008 through 2012, are objective financial snapshots highlighting Punchdrunk's organizational structure and leadership. The reports also identify partnerships, processes, programming and the progression of the mission statement.

Secondary research to support this case study includes both objective and subjective sources with a wide variety of voice and perspective. Performance reviews by critics, lay reviewers, and audience members have been published in articles, blogs and websites, both digital and in print. The reviews and critical written output can be used to measure the effectiveness of Punchdrunk's

branding, the message their work is communicating, and what message is connecting with audiences. Although these resources are typically subjective, facts including performance locations, summaries, ticket pricing, run-time, marketing habits, collaborative partnerships and programming are easily extruded. These sources provide a well-documented timeline of the organization's growth.

Reviewer feedback demonstrates a clear response to characteristics of the Punchdrunk aesthetic. For example, in a review published in a U.K. periodical called DANCE NOW, Keith Watson writes, "So rich is the theatricality of the Punchdrunk experience, so all-enveloping the ambiance created by this challenging and innovative company, that the sensory overload can blind the critical faculties." Reviews from the average audience member are also a useful tool in measuring brand identification. One reviewer, Jane L. from Los Angeles, California posted to Yelp.com, "It was painful to leave this show behind and fly home. It forces you to participate, desperately pulling you between being an observer and participant. you can touch and dig through every corner, drawer, run after the actors... I have never experienced anything like it. it's beautifully decorated, they don't leave anything unfinished. The music, acting, movement, aesthetic, even the lounge music after were all perfectly executed. go WITH people because it's an unforgettable night you'll want to share."

Though abundant, there are limitations to these sources. They are from a specific perspective of the lay reviewer, the critic or the audience. They offer relatively little from the organizational perspective, other than interviews with

media. There is a lot of available information on Punchdrunk's productions, but it is largely curated by the organization.

An additional method of research was conducted, a personal interview with Colin Marsh the Executive Director of Punchdrunk, and will be cited throughout the case study as (Marsh Interview 2009). During interviews, meetings, and day-to-day interaction with Punchdrunk's leadership, there were clear limitations in communication.

Punchdrunk's management, staff and volunteers remained steadfast; they were reticent to offer much insight into their process. Multiple attempts to obtain quantitative data on their audiences were unsuccessful. The organization did offer qualitative output and performance reviews by critics and audience participants. The qualitative data offered was one-sided, mostly positive critical acclaim for their performances.

In relation to social media use by Punchdrunk, there is a very clear change in strategy from the beginning of this research and interview to present. In the early stages, Punchdrunk was outspoken against social media to promote performances. When it became advantageous to use social media in audience development, they changed their position and capitalized on the affordability of this strategy, which is evident with the *Sleep No More NYC* production.

Additional limitations include the time span of the research and completion of this case study. Over a three-year period of time, the Internet environment has advanced rapidly, and now social media has been increasingly accepted for marketing and development in the nonprofit performing arts. A

complete list of social media definitions used in this case study is available in Appendix D.

Nonprofit arts funding differs in the U.S and the U.K. An organization can find financial support at the local, state and federal level in the U.S. (NEA and NEH); and through both public and private donations. Whereas, arts organizations in the U.K. derive some funding from the Arts Council London, funding for the arts given at the Parliamentary level. Punchdrunk was not eligible for U.S. federal funding for their productions in Boston and New York. This may be a driving force behind their more for-profit-centric business tactics which are explored in Chapter Five.

Due to the deficiency in academically published research focusing directly on Punchdrunk's style of management, related literature for this case study is used in relation to non-profit performing arts marketing, branding and management. Most marketing-based research in the field of arts administration will begin with the theories of Peter Drucker, Philip Kotler and specific to this case study, Joanne Scheff Bernstein. The marketing principles of *Managing the Non-Profit Organization* (Drucker 1990) and *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts* (Kotler & Scheff 1997) frame some of the textbook characteristics of Punchdrunk's management style and marketing practices. For example, Punchdrunk has incorporated as a tax deductible charity organization, have defined and lead with a mission (Drucker 1990, Kotler & Scheff 1997) and they have developed an effective board (Drucker 1990). These texts were

specifically chosen to place Punchdrunk within the context of widely accepted nonprofit management research.

Punchdrunk's approach to creative marketing, inventive collaboration, funding opportunities and shared leadership can expand on these texts. The research presented in this case study confirms the predictions made by *The Performing Arts in a New Era* (McCarthy, Brooks, Lowell & Zakaras 2001), which introduced ideas about organizational structure, marketing for the performing arts and aesthetic considerations in marketing.

Literature in relation to branding for the non-profit performing arts like *Arts Marketing Insights*, *The Dynamics of Building and Retaining Performing Arts Audiences* (Scheff Bernstein 2007), which was written to appraise *Standing Room Only* (Kotler & Scheff 1997), and focuses on modern marketing practices. This source is more closely aligned with how Punchdrunk builds their audience through brand identity, word of mouth and social media marketing.

Chapter Two will briefly discuss immersive theater and clarifies the Punchdrunk aesthetic. This chapter answers the question: Who is Punchdrunk and what draws audiences to a Punchdrunk production, with some attending six to ten times per production and who is Punchdrunk?

Chapter Three dissects the organizational leadership structure and explores their productions and accomplishments up to the current 2010-2012 reproduction of *Sleep No More* located in the Chelsea area of New York.²

²Hereafter referenced as *Sleep No More NYC*

Chapter Four is dedicated to Punchdrunk's marketing insights, marketing with aesthetics, and marketing an aesthetically challenging product, in addition to drawing from Sydney Levy's theory, "Audience Segmentation Through Identified Aesthetic Attributes," as identified by Kotler & Scheff. Supporting literature includes *Marketing and Aesthetics in Brands, Consumers, Symbols, & Research* (Levy & Czepiel 1974) and *Atmospheres of Seduction: A Critique of Aesthetic Marketing Practices Aesthetics* (Biehl-Missal & Saren 2012). These publications help define and identify early theories, linking aesthetics to marketing, which strengthen the identity of the consumer and have become a powerful tool of influence.

This case study does not focus on theatrical aesthetics or the relationship between aesthetics and art, but rather how aesthetic judgments further define and identify Punchdrunk. Aesthetic, here, can be used to express intrinsic value to Punchdrunk's current and new audiences. This chapter also highlights select innovations in the organization's marketing approach, which have strengthened its brand.

Chapter Five draws on recent organizational collaborations as funding opportunities which help make Punchdrunk sustainable. The final chapter offers a conclusion and recommendations as to what we can learn from Punchdrunk.

Supplementary research to related literature explores a more current dialogue about word of mouth marketing and social media insights for the non-profit performing arts: *12 Marketing Principles: Word-of-mouth Guidelines that Always Work* (Cafferty 1997) written for the journal *Dance Teacher Now*, *Word*

of Mouth (Coveney 2009) and *Embracing Social Media* (Davis 2010), each written for *The Stage*, a weekly newspaper for U.K. entertainment and performing arts. The *Nonprofit Social Network Survey* (2011) exemplifies new(er) proclivity of social media's use in the performing arts. Punchdrunk's engagement with social media and their word of mouth marketing strategy is becoming a universally important way to signal value to potential audiences.

One final method of research, field experience, was conducted through participation as an audience member in the 2009 production of *Sleep No More* in Brookline, Massachusetts.³ The show was part of the American Repertory Theater (ART)'s Shakespeare Exploded festival in February 2010. Additional field experience includes volunteer participation in the set design for the *Sleep No More NYC*; volunteer recruitment began in November 2010. The opportunity to volunteer and work with this organization from the beginning of a production to opening night offered unparalleled access to the inner workings of Punchdrunk.

Not to be excluded, the following three scholarly papers reference Punchdrunk's performances. The first, *Space and the senses: the (syn) aesthetics of Punchdrunk's site-sympathetic work* (Machon and Broadhurst 2006) written for Brunel University, defines Punchdrunk's productions as "site-sympathetic." Machon refers to one production "as performance art that exists or is interdependent with the space in which it is performed." A second scholarly paper, "*Glory, the Grape*": *Investigating Theatre, Intoxication, and Theatrical Intoxication* (Edmonson 2009) is a speech and drama thesis written for Trinity

³Hereafter referenced as *Sleep No More MA*

University and defines the work of Punchdrunk as „experiential theater“. Finally, *The Early Modern Machine: Post-Humanism and Contemporary Performance Practice* (Masters 2010) denotes Punchdrunk’s productions as having immersive and experiential qualities. These three papers position Punchdrunk’s work within the genre of immersive theater; performing arts with experiential qualities.

Scholars, bloggers, critics and audiences have defined Punchdrunk’s work as experiential, immersive, site specific and site-sympathetic. Punchdrunk’s programming includes these aspects, but can be better defined as a performing arts organization, able to build a strong brand in the past eleven years by capitalizing on collaboration to bolster their financial capabilities through a dual leadership model. This organization has been able to develop innovative marketing techniques to reach audiences, while maintaining artistic authenticity. Punchdrunk’s development of their aesthetic and brand combined with shared leadership, creative marketing and inventive partnerships position this organization to reach large audiences and remain financially agile in an unstable sector.

CHAPTER 2: THE PUNCHDRUNK KOOL-AID

Briefly defined and put into historical context, immersive theatre is a form of performance-based art that developed out of theatre innovations in Eastern Europe and South America during the 1960's and fell out of fashion in the 1980's. The most formidable definition of immersive theater is "a term increasingly applied to diverse theatre events that assimilate a variety of art forms and seek to exploit all that is experiential in performance, placing the audience at the heart of the work." (Machon 2011).

Although early on, Punchdrunk self-identified their work as experiential, now the organization more fervently embraces the title as the "acknowledged pioneer of a new form of immersive theater in which the audience is free to choose what to watch and where to go, a combination of physical performance and design installation to create a multi-sensory, experiential encounter with intense, non-linear narrative" (Sierz 2008). Elements of immersive theater are by no means original. Punchdrunk's productions reportedly draw from influences such as Pina Bausch (better known for creating theater as a social and interactive event), Neil Bartlett (who staged shows in asylums in the 1970's), and Bobby Baker, (a performance artist who performed in her own kitchen for small audiences). Further more, Punchdrunk leadership and critics alike also note references to the stage director and theater artist Robert Wilson and director and filmmaker David Lynch. Punchdrunk's immersive point of view may not be new to the avid theater critic or historian, but their approach brings some audiences

back for more by utilizing rich interior set design coupled with chance interactions with the performers and the opportunity to treat the entire production as a live “Choose Your Own Adventure.”⁴

Punchdrunk’s immersive theater interlaces hints of classic literature with performative storytelling, silent, choreographed dance and dramaturgy. In these productions, spatial design and treatment is given as much focused attention as the choreography. *Sleep No More NYC* is based loosely on the storyline of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, mixed with Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, and the story is woven and looped throughout the space.

Recently, there has been a renaissance of non-traditional theater in both the U.K. and the U.S., which spans site-specific work, site sympathetic work, and environmental, immersive and experiential theater (Higgins 2009, Frizell 2011, White 2012) . In the midst of this experimental theater boom, Punchdrunk has been apt at drawing large audiences in the U.K and the U.S.

Punchdrunk’s version of immersive theater is often related to, “Promenade Theater⁵ or Happenings⁶, but in a massive and meticulous way” (Marsh Interview 2009). The size, scale and meticulous aspects of their productions begin to define their aesthetic sensibilities and define their core audience. Aesthetics, here, is

⁴ A series of children's game books where each story is written from a second person point of view, with the reader assuming the role of the protagonist and making choices that determine the main character's actions and the plot's outcome. (Wikipedia.com. the Free Encyclopedia)

⁵ A theater-in-the-round production in which the audience moves between several locations to follow the action. (Theater-Dictionary.com)

⁶ A type of improvised artistic event that became popular in the 1960s. The events were spontaneous or made to appear so and usually involved a good deal of audience participation. They tended to be deliberately outrageous and confrontational in style. (Theater-Dictionary.com)

defined as the “felt meaning generated from sensory perceptions, and involves subjective, tacit knowledge rooted in feeling and emotion” (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer 2007). Punchdrunk’s core audience is built on these aesthetic sensibilities.

The audiences for a Punchdrunk production span many demographics: young and old, vested in theater or new to theater, interested in immersive and experimental theater or taking a first opportunity to participate in a production. The aesthetic value of Punchdrunk’s work leaves an imprint on the audience. When a Punchdrunk show concludes, there is a ripple effect of shared knowledge through online social networks. This effect is almost immediate. For example, an audience member’s online blog review of Punchdrunk’s *Faust*, “in this production, every single person had a completely unique experience, and smelling the bubble gum on the usherette’s breath, taking a drink with the devil, or walking through a pine forest was an assault on the senses and the imagination. The sensation of being there was addictive, mesmerizing and more than a little other-worldly” (Nelson 2006). Punchdrunk is creating work that “...has a real social power that works subtly, sometimes invisibly, and creates, via embodied emotional response, tacit knowing in people that influences their beliefs and values” (Biehl-Missal & Saren 2012).

Sidney Levy’s theory, „Audience Segmentation Through Identified Aesthetic Attributes,” grouped aesthetic attributes into six factors that help to indicate an audience members’ feeling towards the arts. These six fundamental influences are “stimulation (adj: exciting), realism (adj: familiar), traditional sex identity in masculine form (adj: sturdy), performance art type preferences (n: a

stage play), social status (adj: sophisticated), and seriousness (adj: dramas)" (Kotler & Scheff 1997). The six aesthetic attributes, when used to segment audiences, can differentiate things like class level and gender. Levy observed that people have significant aesthetic interests, attitudes and behaviors towards the arts. The application of his theory assists arts administrators in identifying theater consumers based on their aesthetic leanings and their ability to acknowledge and appreciate art. An audience member's judgment of taste is an individual notion and one that is subjective to each person's perception of „good“ or „bad“. Applying Levy's audience segmentation theory to the Punchdrunk audience's aesthetic judgment, confirms Punchdrunk's core audience as marginally young, spanning all classes, those who are seeking stimulation, activity and excitement as assessed through audience feedback.

Punchdrunk's own perception corroborates this assessment, self-describing their audience as a “mixture of young and old, half of whom don't define themselves as regular theatergoers. People interested in design, music or up for a challenging theatrical night out. They are generally interested in new ways of presenting ideas. Some are just curious. Many come back several times” (Sierz 2008). Colin Marsh, Executive Director of Punchdrunk, describes the organization's target audience as „anyone and everyone“ (Marsh Interview 2009).

The following is a list of typical adjectives derived from critics when describing Punchdrunk's most recent production, *Sleep No More NYC*: “performance art,” “installation,” “participatory” and “immersive”. In contrast, audiences used the following terms to describe this same production: “vast,”

“dark,” “exciting,” “engaging,” “atmospheric,” “dramatic scenes with hints of film-noir,” “incredibly detailed” and “threatening”. Audiences are using aesthetic judgments as a way to describe and define a Punchdrunk production.

Punchdrunk relies on their audience to deepen their organizational aesthetic and differentiate their work. The Punchdrunk artists, actors, the collaborators and volunteers are all essential stakeholders, but it is the audience that is at “the heart of the company”’s creative mission and are the third player in the complex intersection where installation and performance meet” (Marsh Interview 2009). “Audiences are now used to promenade theatre, but what’s unique to Punchdrunk is the sense that you can’t be passive: You need to find the action for yourself. The shows are the result of a pact between audience and performance” (Sierz 2008). The Punchdrunk audience is a crucial part of the entire experience and manifested into each production.

Punchdrunk’s organizational mission reads, “to transform the passive consumption of the arts into life-changing experiences for everyone” (Trustee’s Report 2008). This mission highlights the organization’s rejection of audience passivity and emphasizes their aim to engage the audience in more ways than one, with identifiable key elements to each production.

In *Sleep No More NYC*, a ticket-holder takes an individualized journey through intricately designed and detailed rooms. Each audience member must wear a specially designed, plain white mask while engaged in the performance. The roaming audience member can chance upon the action of the production, which consists of highly choreographed dance scenes. Sometimes the opportunity

for an intimate moment will arise with certain actors throughout the production. Audiences online call these moments „one-on-ones“ and the web is proliferated with detailed descriptions of the many types of these much-coveted personal experiences.

The „stage“ area is designed like an intricate movie set and spans six floors of formerly abandoned building space (this site hosted three separate nightclubs). Each room is crafted as a set unto its own. Punchdrunk’s stated intention is to draw out the innocent curiosity from within the audience by allowing the option to explore and investigate the space at will.

One performance is about two and a half to three hours long and takes an audience group of 15 through small and large rooms, which are detailed in 1920’s and 1930’s-era décor. The rooms were constructed and maintained with the help of over 200 volunteers. Each audience member is given a playing card upon coat check and given a white mask, while being ushered through a dark hallway.



Figure 1: Masked audiences during a performance of *Sleep No More NYC*. Photo courtesy of Carey Purcell of NewYork.com.

Next, a bar appears where audience members can order a drink and briefly mingle before a card suit is announced aloud and a group is led onto an elevator.

A masked docent leaves one or two audience members off of the elevator at a time, on varying floors, and oftentimes breaks up large groups to ensure patrons completely explore the space alone. Each room is decorated and occupied by distinct design down to the smallest sound, light, smell and detail. One room, modeled after a taxidermy room, is filled with purchased, borrowed and rented animal forms from antique shops all over the state of New York. Some actors are performing choreographed dances; fight scenes, murders, ballroom dances and love affairs. The masked crowd can stay to watch, follow the characters, or begin rooting through drawers and cabinets.

There are boundaries to the production. For example, if a bold audience member wanders too far or into „backstage“ areas, silent ushers dressed and masked in all black will intervene. These kinds of boundaries are created then changed with the many one-on-one scenes. In *Sleep No More NYC*, an actor physically interacts with a select audience member and these interactions happen throughout the experience, in closets, and within dance scenes. The one-on-ones have created a sense of competition among the core audience.

Punchdrunk overlaps about 25 to 30 performances a night throughout the space, with about 300-400 total audience members a night. Traditional theater performances have a beginning, middle and end but *Sleep No More NYC's* beginning will depend on where the audience member stumbles upon a scene.

Punchdrunk includes key elements of each production, such as the freedom to explore, a masked audience, richly detailed design, the physical use of building space and audience route, lighting, sound, smell, performance, a bar with

alcoholic beverages and live music (Nightingale, PSFK.com 2009). These elements draw audience interest as much as the „note-perfect choreographic athleticism“ the actors embody (Watson 2008).

The creative leadership decisions to include these key elements position the organization to capitalize on their aesthetic value and build notoriety beyond their core audience; further than those that have already sipped the Punchdrunk Kool-Aid. This next chapter identifies who their leadership is and the key decision-making roles, which have led this organization to become a leader of immersive theater.

CHAPTER 3: PUNCHDRUNK LEADERSHIP

Punchdrunk's leadership can be divided into two groups: the creative-driven and the organizational-driven. Felix Barrett (Founder and current Artistic Director), Pete Higgins (current Enrichment Director) and Euan Maybank (current Technical Director) formed the early version of Punchdrunk in 2000. All three students were approaching their graduation from the drama department at the University of Exeter in the U.K. Barrett, Higgins and Maybank consistently scouted for off-the-beaten-path performance sites, such as empty, abandoned buildings (Appendix A). By doggedly requesting the use of abandoned or derelict spaces to perform, their very first hour-long, one-on-one show in 1999 was created for a modest audience of four. Here, the first team was born and Punchdrunk presented about six or seven small-scale productions. Colin Marsh (Executive Director) was managing a theater company called First Person, and helped to make the introduction between Barrett and Maxine Doyle (Associate

Director and Choreographer).

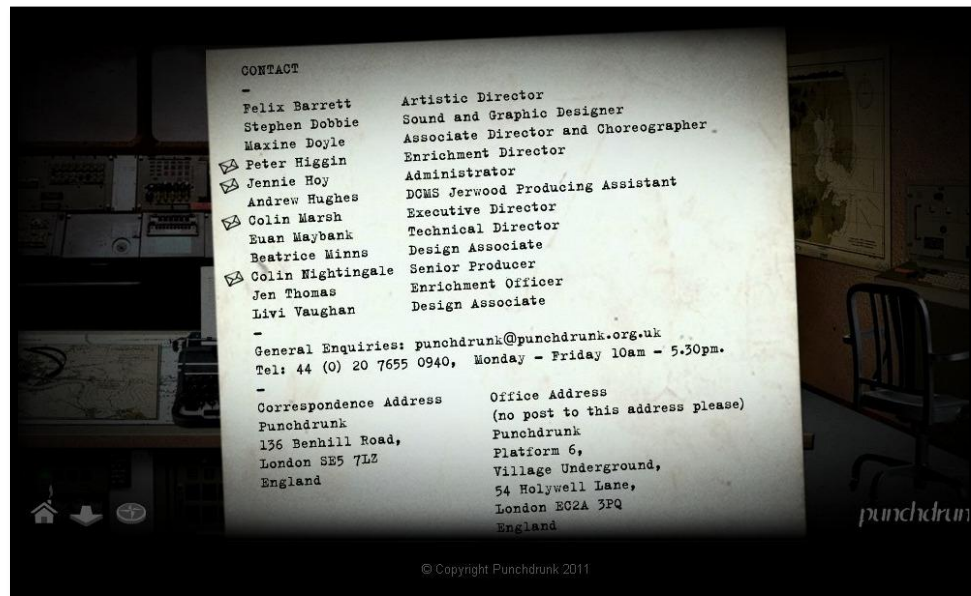


Figure 2: Organization Overview of Punchdrunk leadership team taken from the Punchdrunk website, www.punchdrunk.org.uk.

Punchdrunk's initial programming had artistic and aesthetically-driven decision-making roots, which embody their pursuit to push the boundaries of contemporary theater practice. The organization went through what Kotler & Scheff call, „Phases of Growth“ from the year 2000 through 2006. For example, in 2003, the group was a small, multi-tasking staff which carried strong emotional connections to the creative output of the organization (Kotler & Scheff 1997). Maxine Doyle commented, “the company’s grown hugely in the past few years. Back in 2003 everyone involved was very hands on. For example, I bought the props for productions, recruited stewards...it was all very grassroots. Felix made the masks for the productions, bought yards of fabric...As a company we’re beginning to explore corporate opportunities that allow us to develop the work we’ve done so far and exploring digital media, unpicking the concept of what it

means to be truly immersive” (Chiu 2010). The addition of Marsh in 2003 abruptly placed the organization into the second phase, „growth through direction“ with a more management-driven directive. Next emerged a clear division, between a defined and organized Board of Trustees, and a creative leadership team with Marsh as a conduit.

Marsh is a leader who embodies marketing philosophies, such as “taking on the task of translating external needs into an internal vision” and “translating this vision into action” (Kotler & Scheff 1997). Marsh was a professional performer, commenting, “I was involved in administration [of the arts] as far back as 1980, being a member of an actors” cooperative agency...and I worked for a college friend who managed a contemporary dance company” (Marsh Interview 2009). Having always been fascinated by the practical side of putting on shows, Marsh then began a dance management agency.

Rounding out Punchdrunk’s creative leadership team is Colin Nightingale, (current Senior Producer). Nightingale, the founder of Gideon Reeling, a business venture which creates “bespoke interactive experiences,” was an early patron of Punchdrunk (Dobbie 2012). Nightingale explains his personal Punchdrunk audience experience as “the moment when he discovered how theatrical techniques can create and develop emotions within an audience” (PSFK.com 2009). He was drawn to the way an audience member of these shows could suddenly become wide-eyed and childlike while exploring the scenes. At the time, he was creating events for spectacle parties, which involved intricate maps to locations of the events. It was around this time that Marsh recalls immediately

sensing the potential to transform Barrett's vision into a viable organization; "capable of generating a new form of site-based installation performance with powerful artistic impact." He writes, "I was so sure that a small, underground following of passionate fans could become, ultimately, a mass audience, without sacrificing any of the special personality that the company had then, and still has now" (Marsh Interview, 2009).

Marsh has been able to manage Punchdrunk in a way that has avoided much of the turmoil indicative of managing an organization through growing pains (Kotler & Scheff 1997). The organization's programming demands strict focus on aesthetic development and artistic exploration. Here, Barrett and Doyle take the creative lead in partnership with Nightingale and Maybank. This team enlists teams of part-time, temporary or voluntary staff to find and create the space with the accompaniment of Sound Designer, Stephen Dobbie. Marsh feels he is, "quite at home on the telephone and behind a desk" and in addition to Executive Director duties, has acted as Secretary to the Board of Trustees until spring of 2011 (Marsh Interview, 2009).

Together, this ensemble developed the first version of *Sleep No More* in London in 2003 and drawing a total audience of about 1,000 people, during its ten performance run. Punchdrunk next created a production based on (and titled) *Faust* in 2006. *Faust* is widely noted as putting Punchdrunk on the map with audiences and critics. Next, their 2007 production, based on Edgar Allen Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, ran for seven months at Battersea Old Town Hall in Lavender Hill, London. They were able to ultimately reach a landmark

audience number of over 41,000 attendees (Fitzgibbon 2001) in this seven-month period. As *Masque* closed, the organization approached the next phase of growth, the delegation phase (Kotler & Scheff 1997). Punchdrunk's leadership added a few support staff roles and a few additional producers which completes the most current creative team.

Punchdrunk has been able to consistently redevelop their Board of Trustees since 2008. The trustees manage fiscal oversight, growth and organizational change. Instead of decentralizing their staff, Marsh aggressively devoted resources to further diversify this board through the assistance of hired consultants. This brought a revolution to the structure of the organization. The board has grown to now include expertise in legal, nonprofit finance, design, theater marketing, education and management consultancy, which has helped to create balance between the organizationally driven and creatively driven management. This balance aids in strategic production decisions, pushes to keep the mission at the helm, and creates financial opportunities.

This duality in leadership functions allows Punchdrunk to present programming in a more manageable way, with the flexibility to adapt to the surroundings of the location. For example, the creative team has hired new and temporary staff for their needs in each city, state, and region for the *Sleep No More* productions. This kind of flexibility offers consistent expansion. Their dual leadership supported the organization through transitional periods of growth. It has enabled the organization to refine their mission and vision, register as a charitable organization in the U.K., solicit financial support at varying levels in

the U.K. and enlist staff support in both the U.K., and in the U.S. to mount large scale immersive productions.

Punchdrunk seems to have avoided a few of the common management issues through this dual leadership structure. On the creative leadership side, the artistic director, producer, associate director and production manager take on programming and has pure creative control. Colin Marsh coordinates with the board, who handles approving and reviewing policy, all financial aspects and the strategic planning initiatives at quarterly meetings. Punchdrunk's dual leadership teams rely upon each other to function. This creates an atmosphere to allow Punchdrunk to pursue creative and financial success, as they refine their artistic output.

Measures of success vary widely in the nonprofit performing arts. In this case study, indicators for success are not just financial. For Punchdrunk, success lies where their creative-driven and organizational-driven leadership overlaps. Organizational aesthetic and dual leadership in pursuit of building a brand allows Punchdrunk's mission to come to fruition. This is evident in their marketing practices, which have helped them develop a strong brand identity, explored in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: MARKETING PUNCHDRUNK

Punchdrunk's audience, aesthetics, mission and leadership are all contributing factors to its brand. To communicate this brand, the organization has taken the opportunity to explore, adapt and invent marketing practices. Marketing is the "process by which an organization relates creatively, productively, and profitably to the marketplace with the goal of creating and satisfying customers within the parameters of the organization's objectives" (Kotler & Scheff 1997). When arts administrators write about messaging, positioning and visibility, it mirrors the for-profit sector, with the intention to create a strategy to build brand identity. The ultimate goal, in both cases, is united communication to any group's audience; not purely for audience developmental functions, but also for greater organizational harmony and clarity.

"A brand is to marketing what the mission is to the entire organization. The brand drives the entire marketing function...in an important sense, drives the entire organization" (Scheff Bernstein 2007). Brand building is being heavily utilized in the for-profit sector as a defining principle which can help audiences to recognize a company, its products, and even its productions. In the past, the focus on an organization's brand has been used as a financial development tool, rather than an organizational strategy (Kylander & Stone 2012). Now, more than ever in the nonprofit sector, organizations are institutionalizing their brand. The brand can be crafted to communicate many things, such as the mission. It can be used to market and promote the product and generate a loyal following. Whether

intentional or not, *Sleep No More NYC* has offered Punchdrunk an opportunity to expand on their branding capabilities, especially to U.S. audiences.

Punchdrunk's brand and brand identity are an essential factor for the organization to connect to current and potential audiences. These two factors communicate to an audience who Punchdrunk is and what they stand for. It conveys the standard of what to expect in a Punchdrunk production. "A brand is a promise of a relationship and a guarantee of quality...it establishes a relationship between a product and an audience" (Perry & Wisnom 2003). Punchdrunk's brand aims to guarantee the consumer base multiple levels of engagement and a richly designed immersive production. In some cases, the product is a theatrical event laden with performances and presented in various warehouses, unused buildings or abandoned industrial spaces like the three separate *Sleep No More* iterations.

Brand identity is made up of controllable elements: core essence, positioning, brand name, tag line, logo, messaging and experience (Perry & Wisnom 2003). During the summer of 2010, Punchdrunk was recruited by London-based fashion house, Louis Vuitton to promote the opening of a Louis Vuitton store on New Bond Street in the West End of a London shopping district. Vuitton has held the top spot as the most valuable luxury brand for seven consecutive years (Millward Brown 2012). The collaboration between Felix Barrett and Sam Gainsbury, an award winning show producer, was devised to highlight and advertise Louis Vuitton's new line of products utilizing the Punchdrunk aesthetic.

In the Vuitton and Punchdrunk collaboration, the event created an overlap between the Punchdrunk brand (multiple levels of engagement/richly designed immersive qualities) and the Louis Vuitton brand identity (their heritage/history, travel, luxury, quality craftsmanship). The result was an exclusive evening for press, select audience members, buyers and design professionals beginning at the new Louis Vuitton store.

The audience was then taken by limousine to an old and unused Post Office, where corridors, rooms, and basements were transformed into a living history of Louis Vuitton. Punchdrunk performers led audience members down a dimly lit and „romantic“ journey made to resemble a dream-like 1950“s period; a world of curiosities and intrigue, including libations and dance scenes. “Vuitton knew that opening an opulent temple to high-end consumerism right in the middle of a recession wasn“t the best of timing. Rather than mark it with the usual lavish dinner, it wanted to give its VIP guests a unique experience... to support the creative arts in London” (Garratt 2010).



Figure 3: Images of the Louis Vuitton store launch in June 2010. Collaboration with Felix Barrett of Punchdrunk.

Vuitton“s creative team was inspired to work with Punchdrunk after experiencing an immersive production entitled *Tunnel 228*, which was produced

in collaboration with the Old Vic Theater and presented within multiple dark passageways under the Waterloo train station (Appendix A).

The partnership with Louis Vuitton reveals strength and value in the Punchdrunk brand perception. “A brand develops strength through consistency...like the mission, brand identity has long-range implications, but it must be ascertained that the brand continually resonates with audiences in a dynamic environment replete with changing tastes and values” (Scheff Bernstein 2007).

The Punchdrunk aesthetic, as evidenced in their productions, programming and collaborative output, is further conveyed through their online presence and marketing strategies. In *Sleep No More MA* and *NYC*, Punchdrunk’s brand presence could be summed by the following: dark colors, eerie sounds, mystery, unanswered questions, the essence of bygone eras, script typeface, references to the 1920’s through the 1950’s and classical Shakespeare stories reimagined through the thrilling lens of Alfred Hitchcock (Marsh Interview, 2009). Their marketing strategies have aligned with this brand presence, aiming to create an „air of mystery.“ Below, there are a few examples of the collateral used by their marketing team for *Sleep No More NYC*:

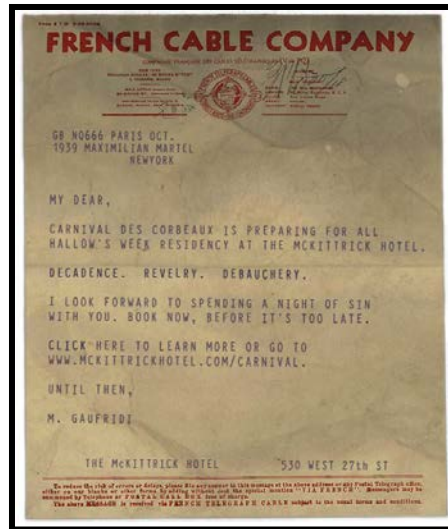


Figure 4: Sample invitation sent via email communication to audiences for a *Sleep No More NYC* related event with Punchdrunk.

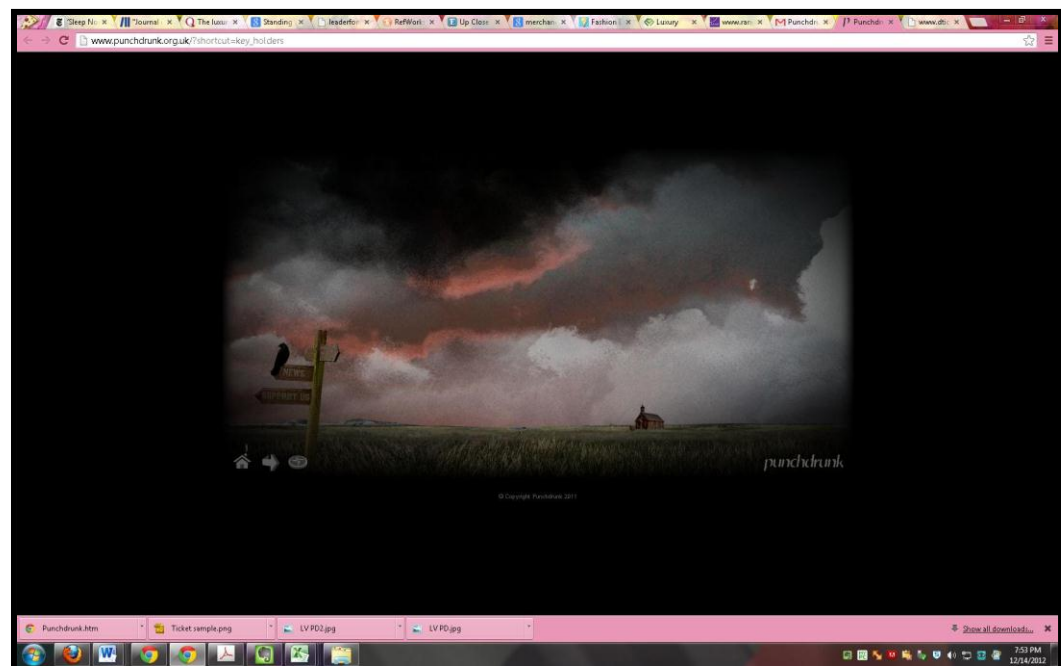


Figure 5: Screenshot taken of the Punchdrunk homepage.

Due to the nature of Punchdrunk's aesthetic and brand, their marketing materials are cryptic and exude ambiguity. In some cases, their communication alludes to an event, rather than clearly explain the production. This causes

difficulty for those less familiar with Punchdrunk and may interfere in a ticket purchase for a potential audience member.

A primary aspect of their marketing strategy relies heavily on word of mouth or buzz,⁷ as it is also referred. Word of mouth marketing, through advances in technology and social media, helps facilitate communication to both current and potential audiences. Jonathan Hochwald, from *Sleep No More NYC*'s producing company commented, "We didn't advertise...this is all word of mouth and social media" (Hill 2011).

Sleep No More NYC's channels for audience engagement and marketing reach are online communities. These communities are comfortable critiquing and publicizing their *Sleep No More NYC* experiences to share information on the how, the where and the why of the event. "The most persuasive form of personal communication for attracting attendance at performing arts events is word of mouth, conducted most often through social channels" (Kotler & Scheff 1997). Modern social channels are ever-expanding online, making information readily accessible. Punchdrunk can log-in and interact on a daily timeframe with current and potential audiences. A dialog between Maxine Doyle and Felix Barrett during a radio interview emphasizes this point:

"You don't do much publicity for the play while you are here, is that on purpose? Do you want to encourage word of mouth?"

"Yes, the whole ethos of Punchdrunk is discovery and if we were to shout it from the rooftops then we are defeating our principles at the first hurdle, we want them [audiences] to feel that they have

⁷Speculative or excited talk or attention relating especially to a new or forthcoming product or event.

sorted it out and have ownership [of the experience]" (WNYC 93.9FM 2012).

Exclusive reliance on word of mouth marketing can be risky. Audiences in any large city have an overwhelming amount of choices available for theatrical and musical performances. Hochwald further commented, it is his belief that paid advertisements are only about positioning and that Punchdrunk's work is too immersive for positioning: that it must be felt, not positioned. He stated, "we took a leap that people would literally find the work remarkable and they would then remark to everyone around them that it had to be seen. The play would leave you no choice but to talk about it, liked or hated, you must talk about it. That is what has happened" (Boyle 2011). Word of mouth has fueled an extended run-time of their productions. *Sleep No More NYC* was originally set to run from April 13, 2011 through May 2011. "It was then extended to June and then July and now to mid-September [2011], because it keeps selling out" (Hill 2011). This production is currently still running as of spring 2013.

To further word of mouth, Punchdrunk employed many different marketing campaigns. Volunteers of *Sleep No More NYC* were told that the show was to open in March and run to April, a short six-week period of time. This six-week period was utilized as a testing ground to engage their core audience; those already vested. Each volunteer was offered one free ticket (a show date and time of their choice) for their donated time and ten discounted tickets as a form of compensation. This production's volunteers committed to work for at least five consecutive shifts would obtain their one free ticket. Regular cost per ticket for *Sleep No More NYC* ranges from \$75.00 to \$95.00. Ticket discounts to

volunteers, paired with media site tours and small performance previews for key enthusiasts, further strengthened word of mouth.

Site tours were given to critics, online bloggers, and representatives from surrounding schools and colleges, especially those with strong performing arts engagement. This triggered Punchdrunk's word of mouth, for the production and also deepening their volunteer pool. Blog posts and small articles were written about the upcoming production and small bits of information about the production were slowly „leaked“ to various press outlets, resulting in a flurry of online activity and social media conversations.

The organization's leadership has been able to successfully leverage the entertainment media and secure positive reviews for *Sleep No More NYC* from The New York Times, VOGUE magazine, New York Magazine and others at no cost. The production's ability to attract star power is evident. There have been many high profile guests who have blogged, interviewed, tweeted and spoken to their own fans about their experience at *Sleep No More NYC*, providing free press.

The ability to attract a following through the media resulted in many impromptu performances by guest celebrities. Adding to the international acclaim, the cover article of the August 2011 issue of VANITY FAIR followed an actress as she weaved through the halls of the *Sleep No More NYC* experience. In addition, a primetime television show aired an episode where the main characters attended the *Sleep No More NYC* (Lambert 2011).

Punchdrunk also capitalized on the online activity through online review sites, where customers can comment on products or services. These kinds of

websites are becoming exceedingly popular in the service and retail industries; they can also influence arts participation. Online review sites offer the potential consumer a taste of what attending may be like as reviewed by peers. A review is written in simple language and accompanied by a standard rating system.

Social media sites like Yelp, Facebook and Twitter are being used by the nonprofit performing arts sector as leveling tools (Appendix D). “The opinion of the masses has become more important, relevant and immediate. This is the new digital face of „word of mouth,“ but because it is all going digital, those recommendations may come from people we’ve never met” (Lord 2010). These tools assist the organization at reaching audience segments they wouldn’t normally reach with traditional marketing strategies, such as a press release. This helps to remain competitive with other similar arts organizations vying for similar audience segments. Social media provides a view into what a certain segment wants, needs and appreciates. Rather than a marketer influencing the behavior of a segment, sites like Yelp allow the consumer to directly voice their opinion and in turn, influence the organization. When first writing this case study, *Sleep No More NYC* had received about 58 total reviews in 2011 and more recently; this number has jumped to over 400 reviews as of May 2013.

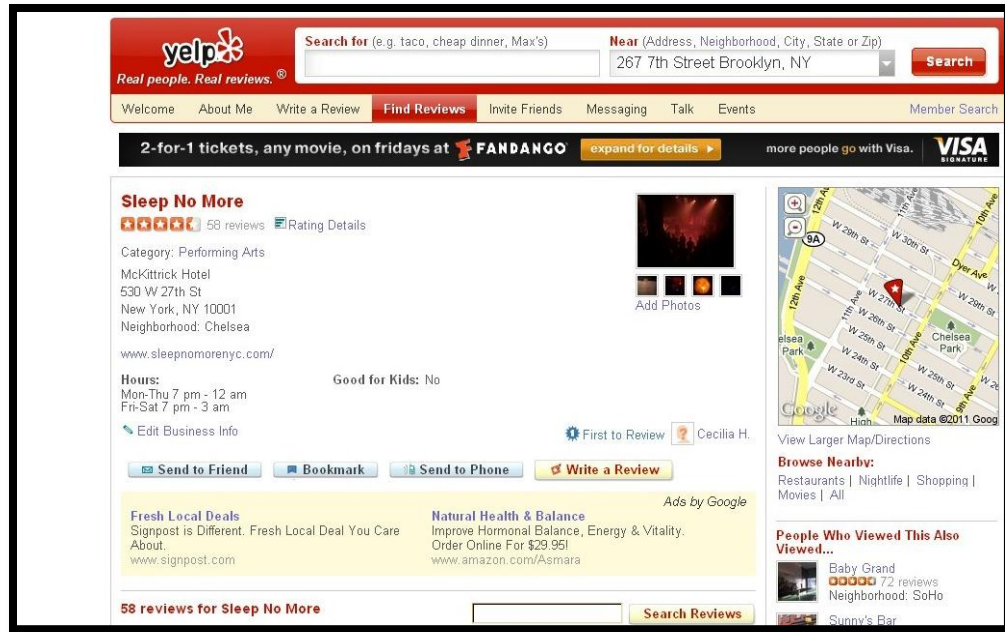


Figure 6: Screenshot of *Sleep No More NYC*'s Yelp.com customer review website.

These easily accessed review sites need to be monitored and it is beneficial for any organization to participate, allowing such consumer feedback. Darby Williams, the Vice President of marketing for PowerReviews, an online ratings and reviews vendor, was recently interviewed in Dance Retailer, “online reviews prompt deeper levels of customer engagement...the consumer's process of making his or her purchase decision is now increasingly dependent on feedback from peers who've already used the product or service in question...this means that a conversation is happening among consumers...a conversation that is moving ahead of traditional marketing and merchandising to become the primary driver of brand and purchase intent” (Shelton 2010). In marketing, word of mouth is an effective method, “even with all the technology...and all the other ways, it’s really word of mouth that can really sell a show...technology makes it easier” (Wren 2008).

Sleep No More NYC eventually decided to champion the use of social media and the Internet as a way to market their work and communicate their mission and brand. This shift happened some time after the opening of *Sleep No More MA* in 2010 and the opening of *Sleep No More NYC* in 2011. Their employ of technology to advance this strategy is evident through social networking outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which have become primary tools in addition to email communication. The nonprofit performing arts sector incorporates these kinds of social media tools to build and target market segments and reach out to various potential consumers. The idea that technology can increase the demand for the arts was predicted. “Technology can create a personalized approach to art consumption, and therefore an increase in demand for niche markets...continued technological advances promote increases in arts participation through media and direct involvement in creating art” (McCarthy, Brooks & Zakaras 1999). It is in these digital buzz realms that *Sleep No More NYC* has become a topic of discussion with shared impressions.



Figure 7: Screenshot featuring one of Punchdrunk's Twitter accounts for *Sleep No More NYC* called @TheMcKittrick denoting the fictional Hitchcock hotel name referencing the location of the production.

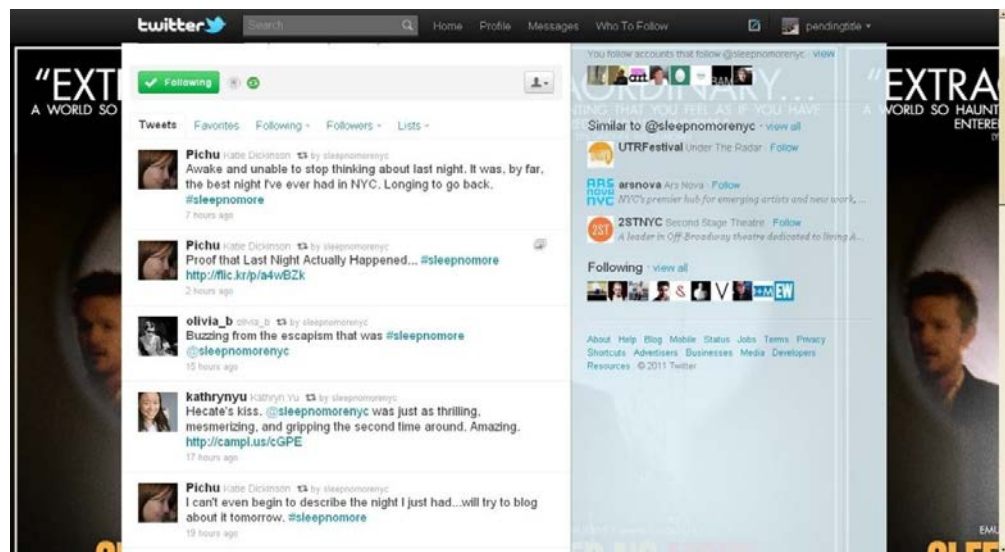


Figure 3: Screenshot of one of *Sleep No More NYC*'s Twitter feed denoting hashtag use and user feedback of the production.

Punchdrunk's leadership has been explicit that, prior to *Sleep No More NYC*, the organization did not engage in social media. Any early social media sites that existed were created and sustained by fans of their immersive theatre productions and were not formally managed by Punchdrunk affiliates.

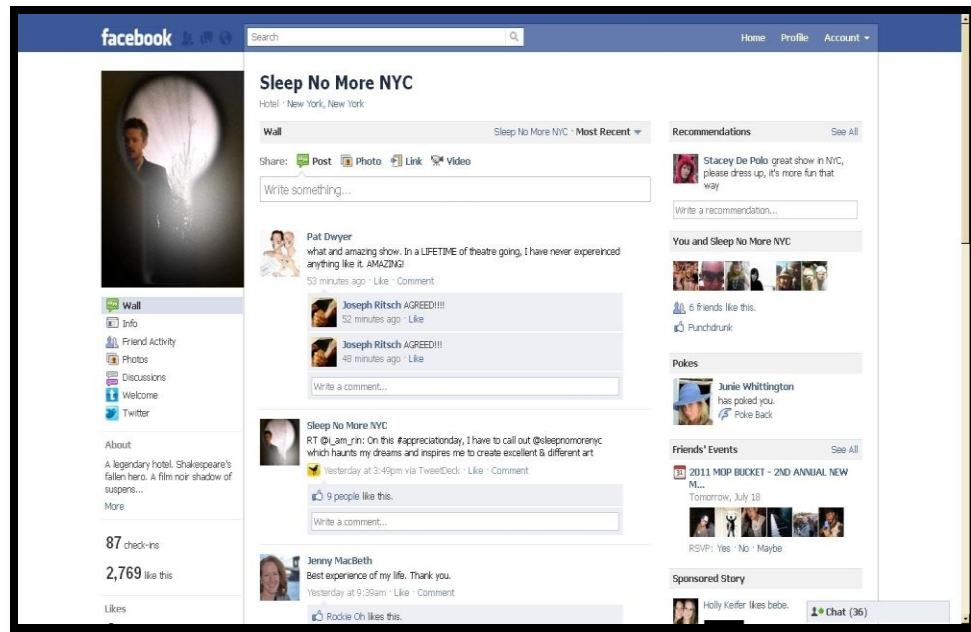


Figure 4: Screenshot of Punchdrunk's official *Sleep No More NYC* Facebook Page, over 2,700 people are connected to this page.

Punchdrunk now curates and moderates official social media sites for their organization and for their production of *Sleep No More NYC*. The production's Facebook page has now gone from over 2,000 fans and 80 unique visits to 18,000 fans while researching and writing this case study.

Punchdrunk has further differentiated itself using Facebook for audience engagement through the development of a one-of-a-kind marketing tool. The online interactive game paralleled the air of mystery in their live production and further strengthened their brand identity. An augmented-reality game was created and launched through the *Sleep No More NYC* Facebook page, in collaboration with Jenny LucidaSansWeinbloom and marketing team.

Gallow Green, the interactive online game, based on Shakespearian and Hitchcockian texts, ultimately leads participants to in real life (IRL) gatherings.

Gamers documented their experiences on YouTube and Facebook in the weeks leading up to the show opening. Portions of this game were played out in New York, Boston and London.



Figure 8: Gallow Green interactive game used through Facebook as a marketing tool for *Sleep No More NYC*.

This interactive game created a rich layer to audience participation with the *Sleep No More NYC* production before the show even opened. Targeted online audiences, who identify with the Punchdrunk brand and have shared interests (such as an eager willingness to participate), were asked to decipher riddles. Once these riddles were decoded, new clues further led participants to live get-togethers, such as a dinner or a scavenger hunt.



Figure 9: *Sleep No More NYC*'s Facebook page of the Gallow Green interactive game as a marketing tool.

Some participants recorded their Gallow Green adventure and posted video to YouTube, ultimately helping their stumped peers figure out some of the more difficult clues.

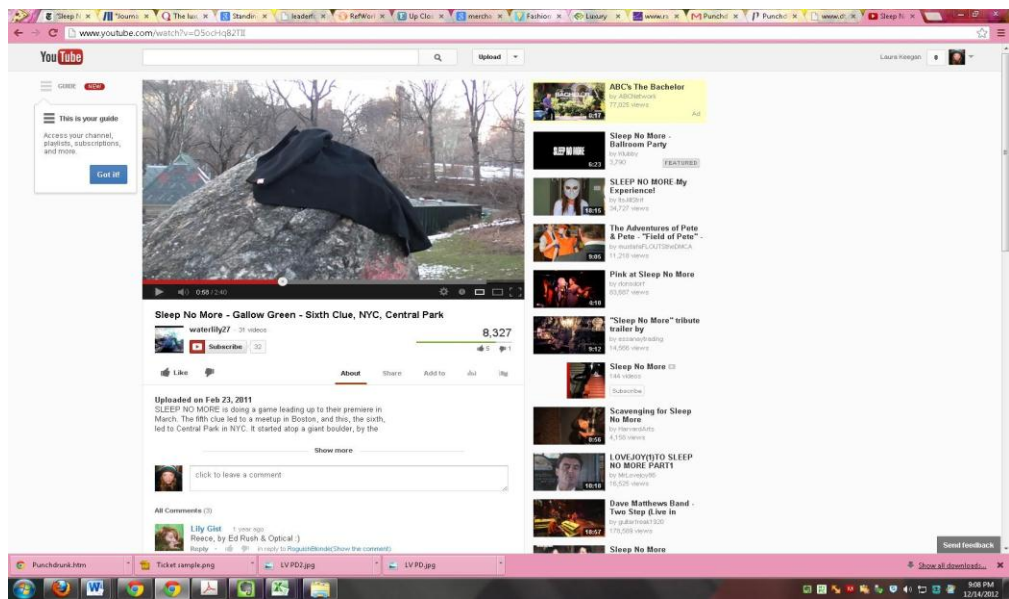


Figure 10: Screenshot of Gallow Green scavenger hunt in Central Park, NYC as recorded by a game participant from Facebook.

The increase of social media marketing paralleled Punchdrunk's entrance into the U.S. performing arts world. The creation of this interactive game had a powerful effect on word of mouth for this production. This application of marketing techniques through technology and social media echo a sentiment made by Felix Barrett. When commenting on his audience and his view of their marketing strategies, Barrett stated, "the key ethos of Punchdrunk is that we're this strange, tiny, curious secret you have to hunt out. We're so, so happy for the success, of course, but it's getting harder to keep things hidden," (Powell 2009).

Punchdrunk's marketing strategies and brand development techniques, coupled with technology and social media, link a small audience of believers together with more curious potential audience. This platform enables Punchdrunk to communicate without being obvious or divulging too many details. Their innovative marketing mix recruits audiences with similar interests; those willing to explore, wanting to engage and those who can identify with the brand.

Sustaining the size and scope of Punchdrunk's productions requires more than communicating their aesthetic and brand. The organization cannot rely solely on marketing practices as a way of boosting attendance and revenues. The next chapter discusses alternative ways Punchdrunk has attracted audiences and funds their artistic and programmatic pursuits through traditional fundraising, development methods and collaborations.

CHAPTER 5: FUNDING & COLLABORATION

Punchdrunk makes use of common non-profit arts funding methods to remain sustainable, such as ticket sales and funding through U.K. grants and awards, which have been secured at the public and private level. An overview of Punchdrunk financials can be found in Appendix B with an outline of public funds secured in Appendix C. The organization's annual Trustees' Reports reveal a steady stream of U.K. public support beginning in 2006 when Felix Barrett was awarded winner of the Critics' Circle Drama Award in Best Design for Punchdrunk's production of *Faust*. This production prompted national and international acknowledgement for the organization's work, and is noted as having drawn large audience numbers (Trustee's Report 2008). This jump in audience size and ticket sales has afforded the organization a bit of a safety net; one which has allowed a production like *Sleep No More NYC* to continue to be developed.

The Masque of the Red Death, September 2007, was a collaboration with the Battersea Arts Centre. *Masque* ran for seven months. Punchdrunk was honored with nominations for both a South Bank Show Award and the London Evening Standard Theatre Award gaining regular funding from the government organization, Arts Council England (ACE) for fiscal years 2008-2011. Felix Barrett and Colin Nightingale were also co-awarded the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Fund grant, which offered additional funding from 2008 through

2011 (Appendix C). Each of these awards offered almost complete unrestricted funding with some restrictions for organizational development.

Government support through grants for the arts, were once clearly different in the U.K. National Portfolio funding, a U.K. program, provides stronger support for the arts than U.S. federal funding. U.K. government support also provides additional lottery funding for arts and heritage. In contrast, the U.S. arts community has historically focused on honing fundraising skills to support their missions. U.K. arts administrators were once able to depend on robust government distribution of funds for the arts; however, support has changed to mirror U.S. Federal support for the arts in our recovering economy. “Government funding has been put under pressure and competition for the consumer’s leisure time has increased steadily. These changes [in support] forced arts organizations to become market-oriented, to respond more to market forces, and to develop strategies in order to stabilize and diversify funding sources” (Boorsma & Chiaravalloti 2010).

Arts Council England (ACE) is a non-executive governing council which delegates and awards funding. The U.K. arts sector is now up against many of the same challenges we face in the U.S.; waning government support for the arts.

Arts Council England wrote,

“In 2010 we have the conditions for excellence in the arts in this country that are quite simply working. We want to keep this golden age alive, for the long-term good of the arts themselves, for their place in society, and simply for the fact they make this nation rich in intellectual, spiritual and economic terms. They are part of our collective soul and common wealth....key to these conditions are two things: the mixed economy of funding from public and private sources, where public investment is made to work hard; and the arm’s length arrangements for providing central

government funding for artists through an independent expert Arts Council. This latter ensures that decisions are made for reasons of artistic merit and not short-term political instrumentalism. Sustaining that success is going to be very challenging” (Davey 2010).

Yet, in the spring of 2011, a series of ACE funding cuts were announced (Smith & Woolman 2011). Over 300 arts organizations lost their funding, some completely. In the same article, it was announced that for 2012 Punchdrunk was to receive a 141 percent increase in federal funding from the ACE spanning 2012-2015, a funding shift from €89,203 (\$132,136) to €236,160 (\$351,736)⁸.

The organization’s commercial successes such as *Faust*, *Masque of the Red Death* and *Sleep No More MA* enabled the organization to set themselves apart from other publicly funded organizations. The recent increase in funding comes with little public backlash. In a highlighted analysis of the ACE’s funding decision, one critic writes, “in fact, if we are being brutally honest there are probably a few organizations left in the portfolio who have dodged a bullet...New funding deals for organizations such as High Tide and the first ever core support for new musical theatre writing should be celebrated, while uplifts in support for companies like Punchdrunk should also be applauded” (Smith & Woolman 2011).

Typically, the cost to create Punchdrunk’s elaborate immersive productions outweighs income generated from the productions. Consistently, since 2006 the organization has had an increase in income. They have realized a rise in income from €133,898 (\$174,428) in September of 2006 to €1,848,015 (\$2,407,409) in 2012. Any surplus of unrestricted funds is retained by the organization to remain at a level equivalent to three to six months of expenditures.

⁸Conversion rates are subject to daily exchange rate changes. This conversion was made in April of 2013.

This reserve is saved in case of significant loss in funding and to allow for research into new funding streams (Trustee's Report March 2008). Punchdrunk has consistently allocated surplus funds for research and development and added robust educational activities and programming in 2010 to their core artistic activities, titled, Punchdrunk Enrichment.

The price to attend a Punchdrunk production has been steadily on the rise and mirrors their box office success. Currently, prices for *Sleep No More NYC* range from \$75.00-\$95.00. This 87 percent increase is considerably more expensive than the 2009-2010 production of *Sleep No More MA*, which ran from \$30.00-\$50.00. In late October 2011, tickets were known to be auctioned off, re-priced and sold online through websites like Craig's List for more than \$100.00.

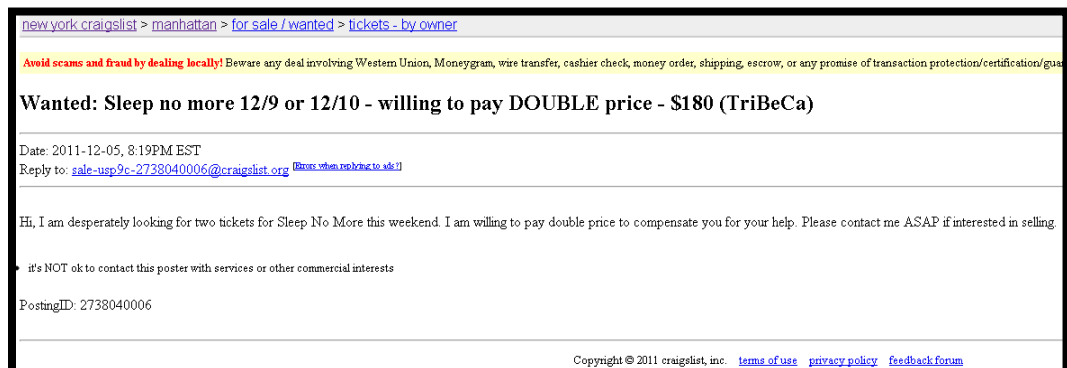


Figure 11: Screenshot of website, Craig's List, where people have been individually selling tickets to *Sleep No More NYC*

In addition, premium tickets were added to later shows, which included dinners, drinks and opportunities to interact on set with the cast. The group also runs exclusive performances during Halloween and New Year, costing upwards of \$600.00, and often including an open bar and dinner. These exclusive ticketed events tend to sell out in one day.



Figure 12: Example of specialty tickets for *Sleep No More NYC*, an e-ticket for a New Year's Eve event running concurrent with the production.

An increase in price and alternative programming still does not generate enough sales to cover the overhead. This production also incorporates a bar, like most of their other productions, but additionally the group established a fully functioning bar and restaurant on the rooftop. The internal bar is titled Manderley Bar, referencing the fictional estate in Hitchcock's film adaptation of *Rebecca*.



Figure 13: Website for Gallow Green, the restaurant and bar recently opened during the fall, spring and summer months during *Sleep No More NYC*. This establishment is located on the roof.

The rooftop restaurant and bar is titled Gallow Green. This income stream supplements traditional methods of selling more tickets each night. It also offers another way to develop audiences, as some patrons come to eat, drink and explore the scene.

In past productions, the performance venues were unused spaces, often donated. In Manhattan, rent and performance venues tend to be extremely expensive. Some costs have been offset due to the interdisciplinary genre of Punchdrunk's work, which has avoided union jurisdiction and allowed for more affordable facility management of the site. *Sleep No More NYC*'s vast performance space was secured through a strategic partnership between a high profile, newly formed production team, including a New York theater owner, a real estate developer and a performing arts theater producer. This production

company, EMURSIVE, collectively owns the 100,000 square foot, six story building (Cox 2011).

The EMURSIVE team is Randy Weiner, playwright and co-owner of The Box, a burlesque theater in downtown New York, Arthur Karpati, real estate developer and Jonathan Hochwald, president and founder of Madstone Productions a New York-based company of touring concerts and theater. Hochwald brings experience from LiveNation, Madison Square Garden Entertainment and the Radio City Christmas Spectacular (Cox 2011).

Also to be noted, Randy Weiner is the husband to Diane Paulus, the Director of the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T) in Boston, Massachusetts. Paulus was largely responsible for bringing Punchdrunk to U.S. audiences for the first time with *Sleep No More MA* for their 2009 Shakespeare Exploded festival. It is no surprise that Weiner decided to produce *Sleep No More NYC* and wanted to work with Punchdrunk, a company focused on allowing the art itself to dictate how the space is used.

“For nearly three decades, the vast majority of capital spending in the arts has been used to construct ever more grand and expensive museums, concert halls, and theaters. Perhaps there should be a moratorium on this type of spending, with money instead redirected to convert existing spaces so that they are better suited to the ways contemporary artists are presenting their work and that encourage a more dynamic interaction between artists and audiences” (Ragsdale 2009).

EMURSIVE enlisted the public relations firm, O&M Co. for *Sleep No More NYC*. O&M Co., also representing the Broadway production of *SPIDER-MAN Turn Off The Dark* and the Blue Man Group company, is self-described as “the most eclectic of the Broadway houses representing everything from

mainstream shows to Off Broadway and downtown happenings, to world-class non-profit institutions and legendary New York night spots.” (O&M Co. website).

A spokesman for *Sleep No More NYC* would not reveal how much the production cost to launch, other than that the budget was “in the millions of dollars” (Piepenburg 2011). “The show’s capitalization costs are, according to producers, well into the seven figures” (Cox 2011). To support such a significant investment, Punchdrunk’s leadership has capitalized on the opportunistic realization that not only are audiences drawn to what the Punchdrunk brand and aesthetic represent but collaborators and sponsors take similar interest.

The idea to collaborate with commercial sponsors began as early as 2005, when Punchdrunk presented *The Firebird Ball* at the Offley Works, an abandoned factory in London, England. This production referenced Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Stravinsky’s *The Firebird* (Appendix A). It was deemed an early commercial success and drew the attention of various forms of sponsorship.

Punchdrunk’s *The Firebird Ball*...became the talk of the theatre world. Commercial producers lined up in the hope of grabbing a piece of the Punchdrunk magic, and so too were music business and event management companies.

Says Colin Marsh, “we had queues (lines) of people who had seen what we had done and the audiences it had generated, who thought to themselves, ‘I want some of this.’... We realised that there was no reason why art and commerce shouldn’t coexist.

In theatre an unnatural division has grown up, but the two can have a mutually beneficial relationship. It happens in the visual arts world all the time, so why can’t it happen in theatre? Why are people so nervous about the idea?” (Gardner 2006).

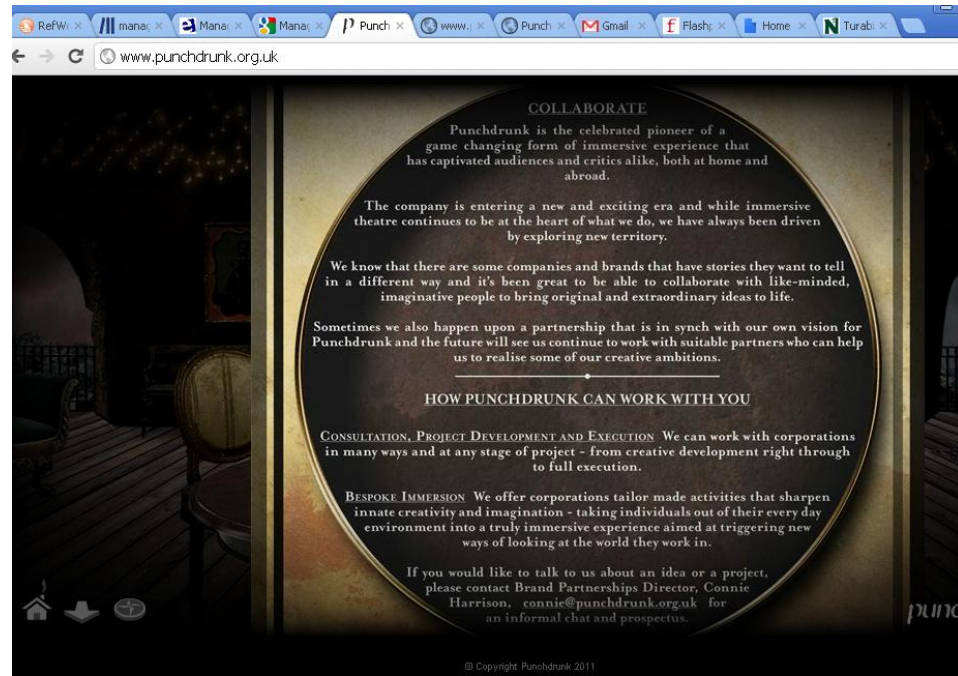


Figure 14: Punchdrunk website screenshot for information on partnering and collaborating with Punchdrunk.

Strategic partnerships with notable corporate brands and artists like designer Louis Vuitton, musical performer Shakira, the beverage brands Stella Artois and Crown Royale, and the upscale W Hotel chain pushes Punchdrunk’s aesthetic into other industries. “Punchdrunk is now applying its particular style to a growing number of corporate events. From beer launches to luxury-goods parties to upmarket hotel openings, the company has provided immersive experiences for celebrities and competition winners, and a PR buzz for the brands in question” (Hibbert 2011).

The combination of traditional funding mechanisms, alternative revenues, creative partnerships and corporate sponsorship enable Punchdrunk to continue to pursue their ambitious mission; to transform the passive consumption of the arts into life changing experiences for everyone.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Punchdrunk creates aesthetic productions that are dramatic and leave a strong impression on the audience. This is evident with their cult-like following and the many repeated experiences expressed in audience feedback online. Although immersive theater is not new, Punchdrunk has successfully pioneered a popular, massive interactive experience, *Sleep No More NYC*, which draws on both pop culture and classical literature. Punchdrunk's dedication to its aesthetic and brand, combined with dual leadership, creative marketing and inventive partnerships have positioned the organization to reach large audiences and remain nimble in an unstable sector.

Punchdrunk's productions are aesthetic pieces; their work has created a brand and their collaborations have strengthened their brand identity. Punchdrunk uses its aesthetics to identify and target a core audience segment and once identified, marketing professionals can use the aesthetic judgments of this segment to communicate the organization's expressed value. Here, aesthetics are used as a valuable audience development tool. These judgments can define a core audience and assist in developing future audiences, collectively creating Punchdrunk's organizational aesthetic.

When applying Levy's audience segmentation theory to classify the audience, in order to better understand who their core audience is comprised of, aesthetic characteristics lead the researcher to identify that the audience as not solely class specific (aside from rising ticket prices), but more so those who are

seeking stimulation, activity and excitement. This theory is further confirmed by Punchdrunk's own perspective and mission, as well as the audience's descriptions and reviews of their experiences.

Marketing an aesthetic product poses many challenges. In this case study, there is an evident change in marketing approach. Traditionally, an organization creates a product and it is the job of the marketing professional to communicate to an audience why to attend, buy, and participate. Punchdrunk's approach targets the interests of an audience segment and creates an environment to meet their needs. The organization seems to find a balance between creating an aesthetic product for a core audience and modifying that product to grow its audience. Further research can be conducted regarding aesthetic value in relation to audience and brand development.

Punchdrunk's dual leadership focuses on creativity and organizational development and is backed by a strategically well-balanced board. This offers the flexibility to adapt to different venues and rapid growth while maintaining artistic integrity.

Punchdrunk is an example of what strong brand identity can bring to an arts organization. This brand identity is attracting audiences, creating partnerships and strengthening existing relationships. The organization is flexible and open to marketing collaboration which directly results in brand recognition.

To signal their brand identity, Punchdrunk explores and invents marketing practices that connect with audiences through multiple levels of engagement. Punchdrunk has been recruited to collaborate on marketing campaigns for

companies seeking to capitalize on the organization's aesthetics. These partnerships strengthen brand awareness for all parties involved, while creating new funding opportunities. However, this can raise questions around the organization's mission awareness and ethics when for-profit tactics are applied to the nonprofit sector.

Punchdrunk's online presence and marketing echo their cryptic and mysterious brand identity. This approach tends to engage the target audience and stimulate word of mouth buzz. The strong online presence bleeds into social media and online review sites, reaching new audiences. Punchdrunk benefited tremendously by remaining flexible in their evolving marketing strategy, changing course as they entered the U.S. market, and making use of online marketing methods. Today, these online marketing techniques are commonly utilized by organizations, both for and nonprofit.

Punchdrunk has also implemented a one of a kind marketing tool, a game initiated through Facebook which led audiences to meet In Real Life (IRL). This engaged online communities, crossing literary and theatrical genres through riddles, to real life gatherings, connecting the core audience before they even attended the performance. This engagement, blurring traditional boundaries, reaches targeted online audiences who identify with the Punchdrunk brand and have shared interests. The creation of this interactive game had a powerful effect on word of mouth marketing leading up to the opening of *Sleep No More NYC* while paralleling the brand identity. A clear understanding of the way potential audiences wish to be engaged online will help nonprofit

organizations better develop audiences. Punchdrunk's approach builds strong relationships with the audience through these types of engagements, creating brand loyalty. This core audience may be more likely to participate in future Punchdrunk performances and events. Arts administrators would benefit from understanding the conversion rate from those engaged in the game to those who attended *Sleep No More NYC*, this is an area that requires further research. The immersive qualities and participatory aspects of the game give a taste of what the Punchdrunk brand and performances represent. However, this marketing technique excludes those not involved online and those who have limited time and resources to invest in such a detailed, extended online to In Real Life experience; IRL to URL.

Although Punchdrunk makes use of some traditional nonprofit arts funding, creative collaborations and partnerships have opened new opportunities for sustainability. This allows the organization to meet the challenge of the highly competitive environment for nonprofit funding, with more organizations seeking funding and less funding available. Punchdrunk's commercial success has generated additional support from the traditional U.K. government funding sources, and has stirred corporate interest. For nonprofits, the addition of for-profit revenue models onto existing financial development techniques seems to be a logical next move to make up for losses in public funding.

By capitalizing on these partnerships, Punchdrunk has also been able to overcome the typical financial break-even or loss of its productions, allowing for

the surplus of income to be reinvested in research and development and educational programs aligned with their mission.

Punchdrunk's newer educational programming, or enrichment activity, includes a commissioned piece for a children's audience entitled, *Under the Eiderdown* and was created to bring the Punchdrunk aesthetic of immersive theater to primary schools in and around London. The organization's other enrichment production was created with the entire family in mind, called *Crash of the Elysium*, and drew about 7,000 audience members in 2011. Another type of enrichment activity was a collaboration with the Arcola Theatre called, *The Uncommercial Travellers*. This was a production inspired by Charles Dickens' London adventures in the East End and is intended for aging audiences.

These education-based activities have allowed the organization to explore alternative audience segments in the U.K., including the very young and the aging. These two segments may not have been able or interested in attending their other performances.

"The company undertook an extended period of strategic and artistic research and development, introduced enrichment activity into its core operation and began to improve the organizational structure needed to support its ambitious creative objectives and enable wider public participation and access to its work in the future" (Trustees Report 2009). The benefits of their educational programming are difficult to ascertain compared to the other work created by Punchdrunk. Further research may be beneficial to the field in order to create a standard method of measuring nonprofit organization innovation. This would

provide arts administrators a way to compare products, ideas and outcomes in relation to mission achievement.

The revenue from *Sleep No More NYC* is funding Punchdrunk's ability to introduce their aesthetic to new audiences. This is an example of how Punchdrunk can continue to develop new immersive experiences aligned with their nonprofit mission, while partaking in largely for-profit activities.

The growing interest in *Sleep No More NYC* has driven prices higher for their tickets, as well as, allow for creation of new exclusive performances which, cater to the elite and carry a much higher cost of attendance. Additional revenue streams have also been generated through the creation of a bar and restaurant within the venue, creatively supplementing traditional methods of expanding revenue by increasing the number of potential tickets sold each night. These examples may be applied to other nonprofit organizations, but considerations need to be made whether these types of additional revenues actually diminish the artistic pursuit and quality laid forth by the artists.

Another inventive collaboration was the forming of the production company, EMURSIVE, where Punchdrunk's stakeholders collectively own the vast performance space. The inclusion of high profile New York producers gave the freedom and control to explore and evolve the production. This model of strategic partnership proved crucial to *Sleep No More NYC*'s commercial success, establishing a stable foundation where the vested interest and profitability is shared among all of the key players. This model may not necessarily be

successful when applied to other nonprofit organizations and calls into question how long the production will continue after it no longer generates a profit.

Finally, partnerships with corporate interests, who wish to bring the immersive aesthetic to their brand, generate additional revenue for Punchdrunk. As another commercial arm of the artistic production, these collaborations bring brand recognition for all parties involved.

The research presented here spans many years and two different productions of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*. The audience for their production has changed considerably over this time. The Boston production differs from the New York production. The ticket cost alone for the New York show limits their target segments in different socio-economic classes. The organization's current focus in New York seems less interested in the mission and more focused on the young, elite and socially mobile audiences. This muddles the identity of today's Punchdrunk. If they produce more commercially oriented activities to fund the nonprofit's mission, is the organization digressing? The cost to attend, at \$75.00 and up, excludes audiences; their work is no longer for „anyone and everyone.“ Are they still able to remain mission oriented?

When a nonprofit organization begins to broaden their revenue stream by engaging in profit-seeking endeavors, at what point should they no longer be considered a charitable organization? Key elements to attract interest in the two U.S. productions were the use of volunteers. Volunteers brought audiences to the openings and set word of mouth and online buzz in motion, spreading knowledge

of the production. Can Punchdrunk continue to rely on unpaid volunteers as they turn *Sleep No More NYC* into an entertainment dining experience?

The challenge of how to maintain artistic integrity and remain sustainable is faced by all nonprofit arts organizations. The combination of traditional funding mechanisms, alternative revenues, creative partnerships and corporate sponsorship enable Punchdrunk to continue to pursue their ambitious mission; to transform the passive consumption of the arts into life changing experiences for everyone.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Overview of production history.

Production Name	Date	Literary References	Location	Collaborators
Woyzeck	1999	Georg Buchner	Disused army barracks	
The Cherry Orchard	2000	Anton Chekov	Former geological survey building in Exeter	
The House of Oedipus	2000	Sophocles's Oedipus the King & Antigone	13 acres of a Victorian Garden at Poltimore House in Devon	
The Moon Slave	2000		Politmore House, Exeter	
Johnny Formidable: Mystery at the Pink Flamingo	2001		Roborough Studios, Exeter	
A Midsummer Night's Dream	2002	Shakespeare		
The Chairs	2002	Eugene Ionesco's play Les Chaises	Old Seager Distillery in Deptford	Deptford X Festival of Contemporary Art
The Tempest	2003	Shakespeare	Buckland Abbey	Colin Marsh and Maxine Doyle joined PD
Sleep No More	2003	Macbeth & Hitchcock	Beaufoy Building, London, England - Building was found.	Building was found.
Woyzeck	2004	Georg		Big Chill Music

		Buchner		Festival
The Firebird Ball	2005	Stravinsky & Romeo & Juliet (Shakespeare)	Offley Works Factory, London, England	
Marat/Sade	2005			Big Chill Music Festival
Faust	Dec. 2006-March 2007	1950's Americana theme	Disused archive building at 21 Wapping Lane, London, England (currently demolished: in-kind donation)	The National Theatre
The Masque of the Red Death	Oct. 2007-April 2008	Multiple Edgar Allen Poe short stories	Victorian Lavender Hill headquarters, the Old Battersea Town Hall offices	Battersea Arts Centre
Tunnel 228	2009	Fritz Lang's Metropolis	Abandoned building under Waterloo train station	Kevin Spacey & the Old Vic Theatre
It Felt Like a Kiss	2009	Haunted America from 1959-69; U.S. Fairgrounds		Manchester International Festival, documentary maker Adam Curtis and musician Damon Albarn
Sleep No More	Oct. 2009-Feb. 2010	Macbeth & Hitchcock	Old Brookline School, Brookline, Massachusetts (building converted back to original use)	Partnered with the American Repertory Theatre (ART); Diane Paulus, A.R.T. artistic director is noted for bringing Punchdrunk to

				the U.S.
The Duchess of Malfi	July 2010	John Webster	Former pharmaceutical HQ building in Eastern Quay, Royal Albert Dock: Donated by Notting Hill Housing Trust	English National Opera (ENO)
Sleep No More	March 2011-Present	Macbeth & Hitchcock	6 story abandoned building, former night clubs in Chelsea, New York	EMURSIVE

APPENDIX B
General operating budget.

Converted to Dollars from Euros with the May 2011 exchange rate.

General Operating Budget Overview Converted € from \$ at the 2011 Exchange Rate				
	2006	2008	2009	2010
Income				
Donations	\$0	\$1,727	\$246,662	\$312,893
Ticket Sales	\$0	\$133,935	\$0	\$291,331
Investment Income	\$352	\$4,287	\$1,360	\$14
Other Donations	\$193,631	\$1,044,156	\$89,494	\$291,331
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$193,983</u>	<u>\$1,184,105</u>	<u>\$337,517</u>	<u>\$895,570</u>
Expenses				
Production	\$183,710	\$980,645	\$220,601	\$415,661
Education	\$0	\$0	\$59,613	\$140,720
Research	\$0	\$0	\$48,521	\$102,529
Governance	\$4,346	\$12,351	\$13,649	\$8,594
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$188,057</u>	<u>\$992,995</u>	<u>\$342,384</u>	<u>\$667,504</u>
General Balance	\$5,927	\$191,110	\$96,464	\$33,201

APPENDIX C
A chart of total grants received.

**The money was converted to Dollars from Euros using the May 2011
exchange rate.**

Grants Received Converted € from \$ at the 2011 Exchange Rate			
	2009	2010	2011
Arts Council of England	\$123,142	\$126,468	\$157,060
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	\$108,656	\$144,874	\$130, 999
Technology Strategy Fund	\$10,865	\$10,865	x

*Note: Arts Council of England reduced Punchdrunk's original grant for 2011/2012 by 6.9 percent due to economic conditions.

APPENDIX D

Social media terms and definitions used in this paper.

Blog- A Website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often links provided by the writer.

Blogger- A person who writes a blog.

Podcast- A program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet: Merriam-Webster online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/podcast> (Accessed February 22, 2011).

Facebook- A social networking service and website launched in February 2004 with 135.1 million monthly unique U.S. visitors. An estimated 41.6 percent of the U.S. population had a Facebook account as of April 2010.

Twitter- A website, created in March 2006, which offers a social networking and micro-blogging service to 190 million users, which generates 65 million tweets a day. Twitter enables its users to send and read messages called tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters.

Tweet- The word used for a Twitter user's typed output with a 140 character maximum.

YouTube- Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover watch and share originally-created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small. (Definition from YouTube.com, Accessed August 2011).

Yelp.com- An online urban city guide that helps people find cool places to eat, shop, drink, relax and play, based on the informed opinions of a vibrant and active community of locals in the know. Yelp is the fun and easy way to find, review and talk about what's great — and not so great — in your world.

Craig's List- An online local classified forums to buy, sell, trade and barter which is community moderated and largely free (Craig's List website, Accessed 2011)